

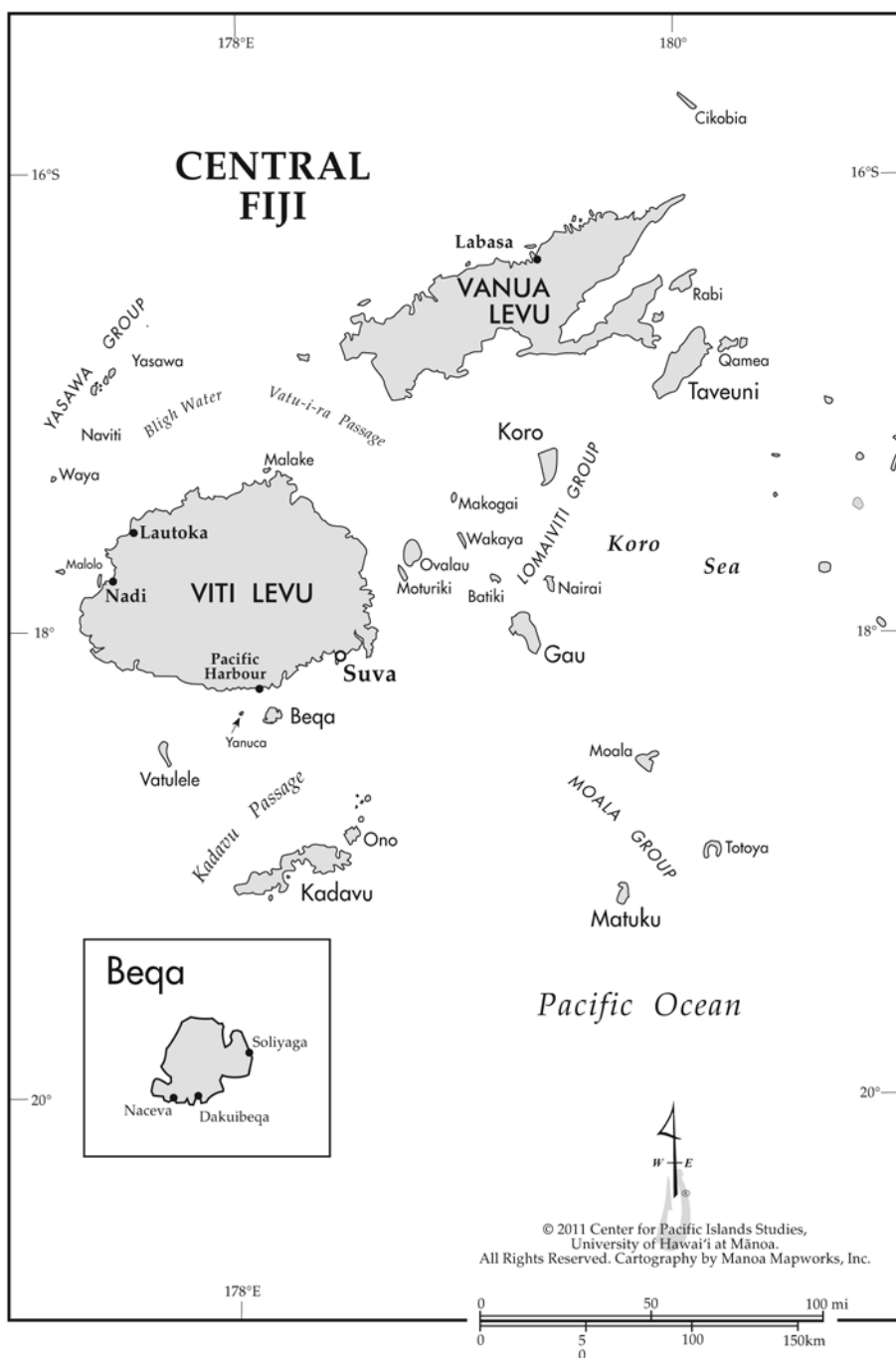
*The Islands Have Memory:
Reflections on Two Collaborative
Projects in Contemporary Oceania*

Guido Carlo Pigliasco and Thorolf Lipp

Robert Bellah's foreword to Paul Rabinow's *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* reminds us that fieldwork "involves constant valuation and revaluation" (Bellah 1977, xi). In this article, we reevaluate some reflections that we have exchanged in relation to our unfolding projects: *The Sawau Project* in Beqa Island, Fiji, with the "legendary" Sawau tribe's firewalkers (map 1; figure 1; Pigliasco and Colatanavanua 2005; Pigliasco 2009b), and *UrSprung in der Südsee* in Pentecost Island, Vanuatu, and several places in Germany, with the Sa speakers' "legendary" land divers (map 2; figure 2; Lipp 2009a, 2009b).¹ Both the traditional practices and the affiliated projects share several epistemological points.

Neither the *vilavilairevo* (firewalking ceremony) of Beqa nor the *gol* (land dive) of Pentecost Island is a "rite of passage" in a narrow sense (van Gennep 1960; Turner 1969). These performative rites are volitional, and mainly conducted by adults, with no coercion toward young tribe members to perform (Pigliasco 2007b; Lipp 2008). They often are associated with peril and analgesia but do not involve immediate change of the social status quo. Both practices involve a "gift" strongly intertwined with social relations, in the sense of an endowment mythically received by the ancestors (Pigliasco 2010; Lipp 2008: 303–309); both involve constant community recitation of the myth on which the practices are based; and both have recently been dealing with contested notions of ownership or intellectual property rights (Pigliasco 2009b; Lipp 2008).

Moreover, throughout the last three decades, both performances have become iconic of the countries they represent. One reason for this is that the colonial administrations of the newly erected independent states of Fiji and Vanuatu were interested in visually powerful symbols that would help



MAP 1

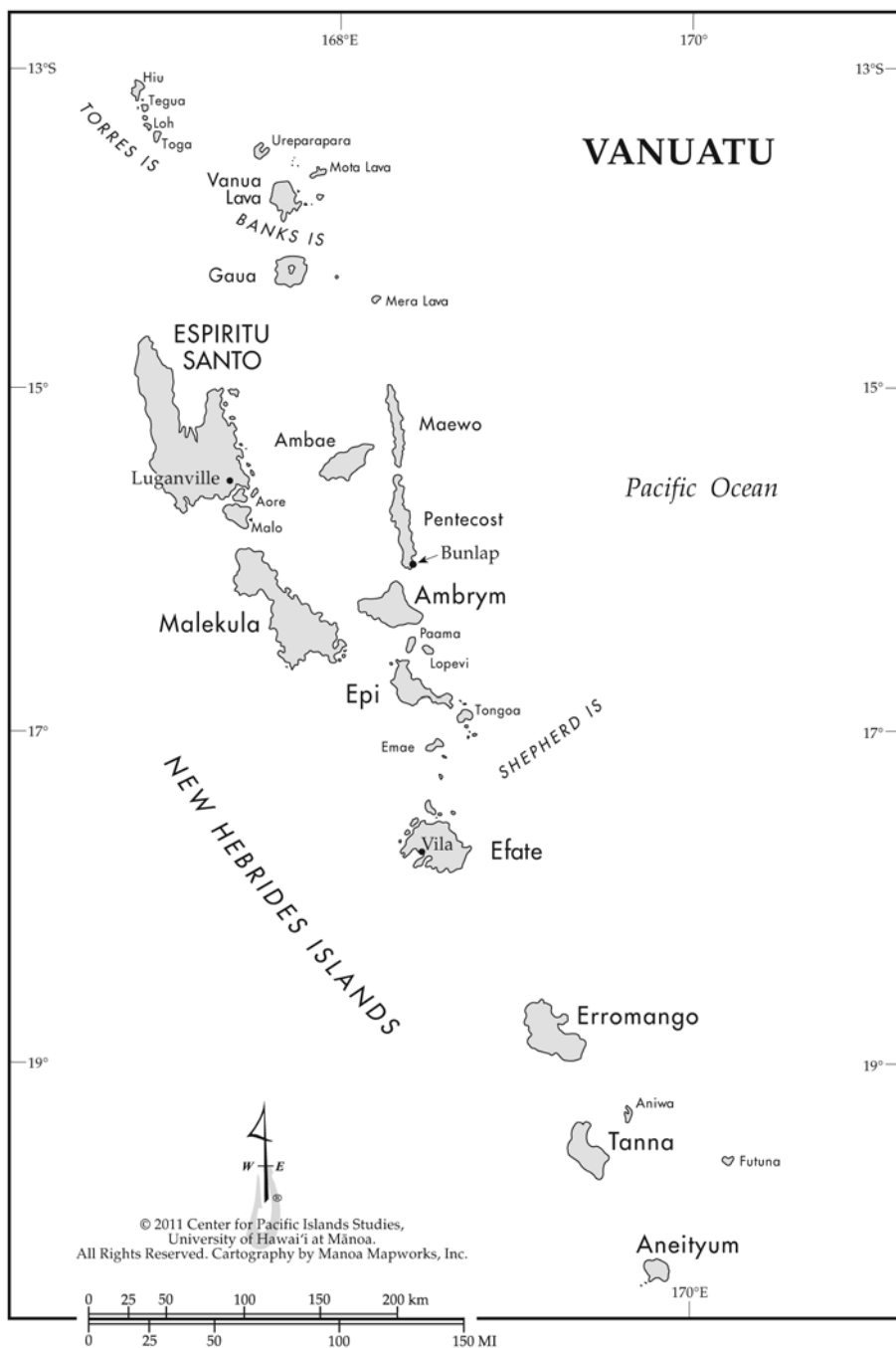


FIGURE 1. A firewalking ceremony at Royal Davui Island Resort, Ugaga Island, Beqa Archipelago, Fiji, in 2005. Photo by Guido Carlo Pigliasco.

foster a common cultural memory. The commodification of these performances and their visual representations has contributed to the transformation of their cultural and social meanings.

The projects based on these practices and described in this article were both designed to be collaborative, empowering, and somewhat experimental multimedia projects. They both fit within larger cultural-mapping activities and intangible cultural heritage protection legislation under evaluation in Fiji and Vanuatu (Pigliasco 2007a, 2009a, 2009b, forthcoming). Both projects also deal with issues of misrepresentation, misappropriation, and commodification of the performances, contrasting some core challenges of neoliberal globalism with multifaceted, multivocal, anthropological perspectives (Pigliasco 2010; Lipp 2009b).

Over two decades ago, Marshall Sahlins reminded us that Oceania's Islands have a history (1985). They also have a memory. Anthropologists often confront the problem of how to turn orally transmitted memories into written or audiovisual representations. But, in the course of our work we realized that we were even more involved: we were also becoming



MAP 2



FIGURE 2. A land dive in Bunlap village, South Pentecost Island, Vanuatu, in 2002. Photo by Martina Kleinert.

part of the Islands' cultural memory due to our actions—what we did and did not do. Cultural memory, the basic frame of reference for human actions, does not automatically come into being. It is shaped by the cultural, social, political, and economical will of people and institutions and by their actions (Assmann 1999; Halbwachs 1950). These projects were initiatives to leave the academic ivory tower and to try to insert some of the findings of our discipline into the contemporary stream of living culture as a service to the societies we had the privilege to visit.

After encountering each other at the 2008 European Society for Oceanists meeting in Verona, Italy, and at the 2009 International Conference on Intangible Heritage in Pico Island, Azores, Portugal, we decided that there could be value in presenting our sometimes very different experiences and opinions juxtaposed in the form of a dialogue.

TL: Why don't we start out introducing our projects?

GCP: When I returned to Fiji in October 2004, the iTaukei Institute of Language and Culture (IILC) was about to launch a cultural-mapping program at the national level, *Na ituvatuva ni kilaka itaukei kei na kena matanataki* (National Inventory on Traditional Fijian Knowledge and Expressions of Culture Project).² IILC cultural project managers Sipiriano Nemani and Meretui Ratunabuabua at the Department of National Heritage, Culture, and Arts strongly influenced my decision to start a community-based project that could become a pilot for other communities' heritage-mapping projects in Fiji.

I already had many photographs, audio recordings, and action footage and had shared these with Sawau *yavusa* (tribe) members to elicit their comments. Felix Colatanavanua and his mother Ro Mereani Tuimatanisiga (sister of the Tui Sawau [Sawau Paramount Chief] Ratu Timoci Matanitobua), who had both recently returned to the village of Dakuibeqa from abroad, suggested that my research materials could be communally shared and collaboratively transformed into a unique representational genre. Our major concern was the expensive equipment that editing and burning the project to DVD required. In December 2004, I created a one-minute multimedia prototype with help from Christopher Robbins at the Media Centre of the University of the South Pacific (USP) in Suva. I took it to the Fiji Museum; the Media Centre of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community Office in Suva; the Ministry of Information, Communications and Media Relations; and the iTaukei Institute of Language and Culture.

In March 2005, the iTaukei Institute of Language and Culture confirmed its interest in the project. Spiritually and financially supported by the recent UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, the institute was to take the role of guardian, protector, and advocate of iTaukei cultural heritage. The project was promptly endorsed by Nanise Nagasuca (who at that time was assistant minister for culture and heritage), and by the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, in conjunction with the national cultural-mapping project to establish legislation to protect traditional knowledge and expressions of culture. The institute gave us a grant to cover the costs of using the editing facilities at the USP Media Centre, but we eventually moved to the new editing suite in the former ILC building on Loftus Street, which was only recently relocated to their new state-of-the-art headquarters in the Great Council of Chiefs Complex.

At this point, many more people started to come on board. Ilaitia Cagivanua gave us access to maps of Beqa at the Native Land Trust Board. More technical help came from Susanne Pohler at the USP Marine Studies Programme and her colleagues Kifle Kahsai at the Department of Geology and Gennady Gienko at the Department of Geography. Epeli Hau'ofa invited us to the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture's recording studio, where Sailasa Cakau Tora, Calvin Rore, and Suliasi Tuilawalawa composed and arranged the music to accompany the images. Ratu Alipate Mataitoga, director of the Film and TV Unit, Ministry of Information, Communication and Media Relations, allowed us to use archival footage of the visits to Beqa of Prince Charles in 1974, Prince Andrew in 1998, and Australian High Commissioner Susan Boyd in 2003. Felix's father, retired professor of geography David Hamilton-Jones, prepared several watercolors for the DVD's jacket (figure 3). Then, with the project fully underway, Aroha Te Pareake Mead invited us to the Call of the Earth—Llamado de la Tierra meeting in Suva in June to share perspectives on traditional knowledge use and ownership with regional specialists and advocates like Clark Peteru, Steven Ratuva, Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, Te Tika Mataiapo Dorice Reid of Rarotonga, Cook Islands, and Chief Viraleo Boborenvanua of Vanuatu.

Despite the emerging local, regional, and transnational interest in documenting cultural expressions and saving them in databases, indigenous communities are rarely the ones who compile such databases or hold the rights to them (Pigliasco 2009b). Felix, who had worked in video production in Canada, designed a multimedia, multivocal, multilinear tool with a menu-driven narrative that allowed viewers to choose from a succes-

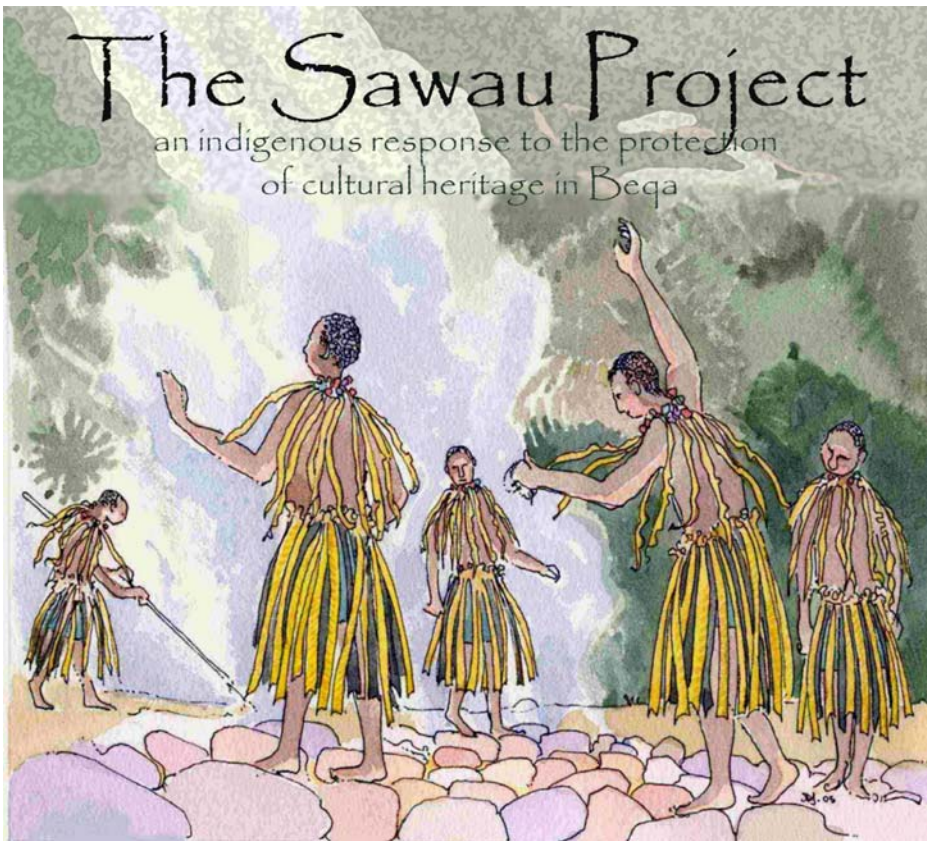


FIGURE 3. *The Sawau Project* DVD cover.

sion of images, providing quick access to different sections of a story map connected by hyperlinks to written texts and a topographic map of Beqa Island.

Felix became involved in every aspect of creating this montage: choosing and editing footage, adding and animating his own photos to convey linguistic and extralinguistic cues, editing the musical arrangements, and building the DVD's multilinear interface (figure 4). The story map is grounded in the geography of Beqa itself, and viewers select their paths through the assembled cultural data. Indigenous knowledge and culture are scattered in the minds of many members of a community but are rarely collected in visual form and thus can be difficult to envision. The story map becomes a locus where Sawau villages, cultural sites, and memories are reclaimed and safeguarded.



FIGURE 4. Felix Colatanavanua (right), on location in Suva during *The Sawau Project*'s follow-up shooting. Photo courtesy of Felix Colatanavanua.

The Sawau Project currently remains in Fijian language and is open only to Sawau community members and researchers who have obtained permission from the head of the Naivilaqata priestly clan and the iTaukei Institute of Language and Culture. This creative work of digital media was intentionally designed for minimal circulation and limited academic contexts. Visual anthropologist Kate Hennessy described *The Sawau Project* as illustrating “the complexity inherent in the mass-mediation of cultural heritage, as well as the revitalization and assertion of indigenous rights to self-representation in a postcolonial and national context” (2009, 91).

In other words, *The Sawau Project* shows that new methodologies that are in stark contrast to purely observational approaches can be created to meet the demand for social intervention in situ to preserve traditional forms and symbols. Not a documentary, but rather a montage of documents, the project creates an inventory of sites, stories, and shared memories of the Sawau people, recognizing that collaboration is a vehicle through which knowledge, understandings, and visual representations are produced.

TL: I began fieldwork in Pentecost, Vanuatu, in 1997, when I was working as a research fellow at the University of the South Pacific in Suva. I returned in 2002 and 2004 with a grant from the German Research Foundation. In 2002, some of my closest collaborators started talking about visiting the visitor in return. I promised to try to organize an exhibition of *juban* (masks) from the village of Bunlap and invite their creators to Germany for the opening, but by 2004, it was already clear that no museum would finance the visit of several men for one small mask exhibition. However, the project grew bigger over time, and more institutions and donors joined in.

It took four long, arduous years to raise the necessary funds. For Germans, Oceania is far away and colonial history is long ago. The region offers neither economic opportunities nor resources of interest to German companies. What's more, the visitors from Bunlap didn't fall under normal categories for cultural exchange: By our standards, they didn't belong to a church and weren't academics, artists, politicians, or scholars, although in fact they were all of these by their own standards. Because of this perception, most funding sources were not available to us. We eventually found around twenty German foundations—only one focused on Oceania—with programs fostering cultural exchange, museum projects, or both. We spent many months becoming familiar with the requirements of each funding program, filling in the forms, adding pictures and treatments, and sending them off, but all to no avail. My colleague Martina Kleinert and I thought that it might help to found a nonprofit organization, so we created the “Forum of German-Pacific Encounters” (www.forum-deupaz.de)—in itself a complicated process that generated more bureaucratic work than funding. We asked major airlines for travel support, equally unsuccessfully.

When we started contacting large companies, we had our first success. The owner of Germany's major bungee-jumping enterprise, who had visited Bunlap in 1993, donated a large sum. Next, a wealthy Swiss man who had seen a film about land diving that I produced during my PhD work and was eager to go to Pentecost himself contacted me for my help and eventually made several donations to the project. Bit by bit, other donors came on board: the State Museum of Ethnography in Munich donated publicity and financed all constructions in their exhibition space. The South Seas Collection in Obergünzburg offered support, followed by Vanuatu's ambassador to Germany, UNESCO, and several small companies and private donors. We finally succeeded in collecting enough money and

in-kind aid to cover all expenses, including a salary for our guests from Vanuatu and daily allowances for the German team. Salaries for Martina's and my work were not contemplated.

By that time the project was to comprise three exhibitions. At the State Museum for Ethnography in Munich, one exhibition would focus on *kastom* in Bunlap as a remarkable cultural phenomenon. *Kastom* is a Melanesian Pijin word (from English "custom") denoting ideologies and activities formulated in terms of empowering indigenous traditions and practices (Akin 2004, 299–303). The dramaturgical idea of the exhibition consisted of a gentle introduction of visitors to the diverse and often contradictory meanings of *kastom*, employing large photographs and drawings and several video and object installations, such as the village telephone, an abstracted dancing ground, and an abstracted house of original materials (figure 5). Outside the museum, a one-quarter-size model of a land-diving tower would attract visitors who would not normally be interested in ethnographic themes (figure 6).



FIGURE 5. State Museum for Ethnography, Munich, 2009. Objects, photographs, drawings, texts, and interactive audiovisual displays were used to develop a multimedia, multilayered presentation of Bunlap *kastom*. Photo by Martina Kleinert.

In the second exhibition, the initiators of the new South Seas Collection in Obergünzburg wanted to establish direct, personal links with people from Oceania. They were also looking for a typical house to fit in a dedicated space. We suggested that a house be dismantled in Pentecost and rebuilt in the museum by our partners from Bunlap with the help of local Bavarian people. (What we first considered a rather simple, practical approach to “collaboration” later turned out to foster much more bonding than we had hoped.) A third exhibition at the Iwalewa Haus in Bayreuth, a museum for contemporary art from non-Western countries, would display the *juban* masks.

In conversations with my friends in Bunlap, especially Chief Warisul and Bebe Malegel, it had become clear that they were very concerned about how their *kastom* would be portrayed. For them it was extremely important that no Western clothes—no men wearing shorts or women covering their breasts—would be visible. They did not see other objects from the West, such as the village telephone, as contrary to *kastom*, mainly because theirs was the first telephone on that side of the Island; they were proud of it as an achievement of the *kastom* community.



FIGURE 6. Betu Watas, Tolak Telkon, and Mathias Watskon building the one-quarter-size model of a land-diving tower in front of the State Museum for Ethnography in Munich. Photo by Jacob Kapere.

To differentiate *kastom* from culture as a whole is problematic; it may seem right to say that culture is *kastom* and *kastom* is culture. It is often high-ranking elder men who act on the right to bring about cultural change by overstepping common men's law and perhaps making new laws and making or remaking traditions (Bonnemaison and others 1996). Joël Bonnemaison provided an excellent example of an emic concept of *kastom*. He asked a high-ranking man from Pentecost what *kastom* was. The man "replied with sublime arrogance: 'I am *kastom*'" (Bonnemaison and others 1996, 202). In South Pentecost, *kastom* basically means that certain Western influences, including clothes, school, and medical care, are not or only seldom used.

Martina and I felt that for a Western audience the traditional artifacts—the *gol* model, houses, *juban* masks, and traditional clothes—would be in stark visual contrast to the village telephone or to photographs and film sequences that clearly indicated simultaneity of the non-simultaneous: for example, *kastom* men wearing penis wrappers playing modern guitars, or *kastom* dress combined with soccer outfits. Our choices of what should and should not be displayed questioned concepts of linear development from tradition to modernity and, in that, I think, reflected *kastom*—and its many inherent contradictions—rather well (figure 7).

In addition to the exhibitions, Martina and I planned a reverse anthropology film and photography project in which our guests could visually document and comment on their experiences. We had seen the British documentary series *Meet The Natives*, which shows a group of *kastom* men from Tanna, Vanuatu visiting the United Kingdom and the United States. However, we did not consider this a role model for our own project; it seemed a typical example of television producers creating and financing their own, otherwise nonexistent, reality. We thought it important that the project had developed over years, and that our guests would not only visit for the sake of a visit, but also have a veritable assignment that would give them the status of ambassadors of their country, their island, and their *kastom*.

TL: Let's turn to some of the methodologies we used. When you left for your fieldwork in Fiji did you already have in mind doing some kind of "collaborative" work?

GCP: Yes, but without knowing the Sawau people's concerns, I had no idea where to start. However, in several discussions with University of Hawai'i



FIGURE 7. Telkon Betu of Bunlap filming in front of one of Bunlap's men's houses, 2009. Photo by Thorolf Lipp.

(UH) professors just before I left for Fiji, Vilsoni Hereniko suggested that I take an active part in representing the Sawau *yavusa* firewalkers, while with Cristina Bacchilega, the idea emerged of identifying what Sawau children saw as important elements of their own cultural heritage, à la *Marshall Islands Legends and Stories* (Kelin, Aisea, and Nashon 2003). Andrew Arno thought of taking Hereniko's suggestion from a visual perspective, aiming at helping the Sawau people to employ images as cultural productions, against the background of older, less field-based ethnographies of indigenous societies and of "touristic translation" (Bacchilega 2007, 16–17).

Previous work on a documentary film in New Ireland had planted several bugs in my head about "truth," "objectivity," and "our control" over images (Pigliasco and Francalanci 1993). When we capture, translate, and export images from their place of origin and package them for consumption by Western audiences, who "owns" those images? My experience of such ethical dilemmas suggested to me that academics have a moral obligation, and that protocols of informed consent should be an ongo-

ing interaction between researchers and members of the community being studied or filmed.

On that boat slowly heading to Beqa Island in autumn 2004, trying to keep my Sony Handycam dry, I was assaulted by thoughts of the harm I might cause to the culture I was about to study and wondered what the community could gain from my stay. To be very honest, looking back on my fieldwork now, I'm still not sure whether it was a truly reciprocal endeavor or not. I believe that multiple ideas, voices, agendas, and interests should inform contemporary ethnography, but it is easy to get stuck in debates about the researcher's ethnicity that ignore why we do the research and why we establish collaborations (see van Meijl 2009).

TL: In principal, I would agree that collaboration, empowerment, and reciprocity are convincing epistemological bases for contemporary anthropological endeavors. When I started *UrSprung*, I felt that this was a sound point of view that I and all my colleagues in anthropology naturally embraced. But *UrSprung* was an excellent example of the complexity of things. What I had naively thought were goals worth striving for—facilitating exchange, bringing people together, learning from each other with the intention of overcoming prejudices—others clearly didn't. They didn't believe in the objectives, in the means to reach them, or both. So I found out that I had some very basic epistemological questions to answer and had to look much deeper into the terminology: empowerment, yes, but of whom? Is it maybe just another way of exerting power? Collaboration and reciprocity, fine, but with whom? Who gives whom a voice, on what epistemological assumptions, and under which specific circumstances? And who will draw what conclusions from all these actions?

These questions are complex, and I had to break them down to a very basic distinction. One can argue that the rightness or wrongness of an act derives from the character of the agent rather than from the nature or consequences of the action itself. Several colleagues argued from this point of view, commonly called deontologism: "It's impossible to invite these *kastom* people to Germany. It's an unequal relationship because they can't read or write and thus need your help to raise the necessary funds. Moreover, they can't possibly know what they will face here, and therefore bringing them over would be experimenting with them. And you shall not experiment with human beings!"

In other words, what I saw as advocacy, empowerment, and reciprocity, they declared to be in principal unethical. My Ni-Vanuatu partners were

illiterate, but they had asked me to help them raise the funds. I wondered: Why should my actions as a human medium, through which they hoped to reach their goal of visiting Germany, be of less value than the use of another cultural technique, writing, that they were not conversant with? Why a hierarchy of means if the results were comparable? Who had established this hierarchy of cultural techniques?

GCP: Can you tell me more about the obstacles inside and outside academia that you've encountered?

TL: Well, for example, some alleged that photographs of *kastom* people wearing penis wrappers or grass skirts would refuel the simultaneously romanticizing and degrading European imagination of (noble) savages from the South Seas, saying, "You cannot show photographs of almost naked people." They were unimpressed by my objection that the *kastom* people themselves had fought for almost a hundred years for their identity, of which the traditional dress is an integral part. Images of black villagers in customary dress were seen as eroticization, exoticization, and exploitation of Pacific sexuality by a white, Western audience.

The villagers' pride in this *kastom* and desire to be portrayed this way did not matter. I was struck by the extremely static vision of culture of these intellectuals, who neither believed that society could replace outdated, racist attitudes nor trusted their own ability to actively change attitudes. Could it not be that the image of a villager in customary dress in 2011 is understood and contextualized based on a very different discourse than in 1960? Was I naive to believe in such change?

Another interesting example of this static view was the reaction to the project's name and the design of the promotional materials. The name *UrSprung* inspired some discussion on one of the Pacific studies e-mail networks. Some liked it and embraced the visual message: "*UrSprung* is a pun. It means source, well, origin, birth, fountainhead, a jump into life, beginning, absolute beginning, ancestral beginning. Of course it is European, but it is an invitation meant for a European audience, an effort to meet halfway the uninformed but interested by the sensational. And there is some beauty in the combination of the word *UrSprung* and the image of the bunji-jumping Ni-Vanuatu, I hope" (Dutch anthropologist Rene van der Haar, pers comm, June 2009).

A German expert on Melanesia disagreed: "I would rather say that *UrSprung* was *intended* to be a pun. What the word does, however, is to

feed into an unreflected exoticism (one has only to think about the old Western fascination with what in German is called *ursprungsmythisches Bewußtsein* [mythic consciousness]). The same can be said about the photos. In this sense they are more revealing than the curators themselves might realize" (Holger Jebens, pers comm, June 2009).

Some feared that the whole venture might be misunderstood as a contemporary "Völkerschau" or "Human Zoo," as our partners from Vanuatu would be present and even doing physical work at German ethnographic museums (which some perceive as the ultimate neocolonial institutions). I was seriously advised on this account to stop the project before I ruined my career.

I was surprised that fellow anthropologists, who were no armchair philosophers but had carried out extensive fieldwork, didn't bother to look at the specific context and motivations for this undertaking. They reasoned solely from an abstract deontological viewpoint. What I learned from the *UrSprung* experience is that as long as you don't leave an approved ethical framework and as long as the character of the agent is "good," you are on safe epistemological ground where your reasoning is "in principal" always right. As a method, this might work for certain academic discussions, but it renders cultural production almost impossible.

The opposite of deontologism is consequentialism: a morally right action is one that produces a "good outcome" or "good consequences." In this approach, there will never be a perfect way of "doing culture," because all actions have unforeseeable consequences. For *UrSprung* I clearly opted for consequentialism, or what Max Weber called an "ethic of responsibility," which he opposed to an "ethic of ultimate ends" (1919, 56–66). I felt that, because communication is always faulty to some extent, some of our concerns and anthropological points of view can probably not be communicated in their entirety.

Over two hundred years ago Johann Gottfried Herder pointed out that anthropology is always built on prejudices that it must dismantle (1935). I thought that *UrSprung* could interest our European audience by building on existing symbols. Once people visited the exhibitions, these visual lures would be contextualized by the written word, the juxtaposition of pictures, a range of audiovisual narratives, guided exhibition tours, and the chance for visitors to meet and talk with our guests personally.

Our ultimate goal was to get visitors to see the *kastom* phenomenon in its own right and to understand that their first associations with these images might have to be readjusted. I knew that there could be potentially

unpleasant consequences for all involved: I suspected that it might not be easy for our Melanesian partners to share and display knowledge that is a highly contested, while partly secret good, such as erecting a *gol* model. I knew that they would have to face the jealousy of those who stayed home. I guessed that it might not be easy for them to adapt to the circumstances of life in Europe. I was afraid that they might experience prejudice, even racism. And I guessed that it might be quite a task for the European team to handle their different concepts of time, their illiteracy, and their need to have contact persons around twenty-four hours a day. But I hoped the result would be that all involved—our guests, the audience, and the organizers—would have a chance to grow and learn from each other.

To value learning and personal growth is also culture specific in some ways, but in this particular case it was much in line with the Melanesian ethos that I had come to know during fieldwork in Pentecost. It was also very important to me personally that my Ni-Vanuatu partners would see and remember that I kept my promise and showed them my world after they had shown me theirs.

GCP: While you had to contest the notion of the “human zoo,” one of our objectives became to reject the “itinerant circus performer” image that the Sawau firewalkers had acquired long ago from participating in overseas exhibitions at the end of the nineteenth century (Pigliasco 2007b, 2010, nd). The Fijian *vilavilairevo*, traditionally performed only by members of the Sawau tribe of Beqa, is a prime example of a propitiation ritual romanticized and subsequently commodified. Over the last two centuries, the ceremony has been shaped by the requirements of colonial pomp and circumstance, tourism, and Christianity into a brand statement of Fijian national culture (Pigliasco 2010, 2011, forthcoming, nd).

Early colonial accounts indicate that the ceremony was being performed to entertain colonial representatives and foreign dignitaries visiting Fiji by the end of the nineteenth century (Allardyce 1904; Haggard 1903; Hocken 1898; Jackson 1899; Lindt 1893; *Na Mata* 1885; Thomson 1894). Today, entrepreneurship around the *vilavilairevo* represents a small-scale, cash-generating enterprise that is expected to yield substantial long-term financial returns to participants and their kin. The returns and the prestige are communally shared (Pigliasco 2010). Currently, seven groups from the Sawau *yavusa* regularly perform *vilavilairevo*, approved by the Tui Sawau and the Naivilaqata elders in Dakuibeqa, with more than one hundred male individuals entitled to perform it. Five groups are on Beqa—three

from Dakuibeqa, one from Naceva, and one from Soliyaga; outside Beqa, there is a group from neighboring Yanuca Island and one from Lapanoni settlement near Pacific Harbour, Deuba, on Viti Levu.

In the process of documenting and creating a representation of the *vilavilarevo*, Felix and I have been accused of making money from it by an expatriated daughter of a well-known Beqan elder. In the 1970s, that elder had been one of the key figures in the emerging market for firewalking shows. In January 2004, after my collaborator Mika Tubanavau and I gave him full details, he happily agreed to participate in the project. We taped his verbal consent. He then showed us some rare images and allowed himself to be filmed and photographed with them. At the end of a long interview, doleful that we could not stay longer, he asked us to visit again soon. However, while we were running some previews of the project, his daughter sent a message asking us to remove his name and images. I felt we could change his mind, but Felix, who was in charge of editing on behalf of his tribe, felt it was not appropriate to pressure an elder or his family into changing their decision.

Felix and I interpreted all given consent only as preliminary to final approval from the person interviewed, filmed, or photographed. Furthermore, all participants during my fieldwork were offered the opportunity to verify statements, remain anonymous, and receive copies of my final report. For example, Felix's cousin, the Tui Sawau, allowed us to use Sawau genealogical references in the song lyrics written to accompany the images only after hearing the songs and having the composer and singer Sailasa Cakau Tora formally present to him a *tabua* (whale's tooth), the highest symbol of respect, loyalty, and goodwill in the Fijian "economy of sentiment," as Andrew Arno elegantly called it (2005).

From these experiences, I believe that any ethnographic endeavor should be tailored to specific requirements for social intervention and should be able to suggest new methodologies that foster an ethical relationship with those on whom our anthropological knowledge, collaborative ethnographies, and publications are based. Researchers must explain what they study, and why it is important for the people themselves.

The Naivilaqata priestly clan custodians understood the potential of the project, primarily in terms of a label of authenticity. Customary law protection relies on norms and sanctions that seem to make sense only to community members. Many of the individuals engaged in unauthorized uses of Sawau traditional cultural expressions are either non-Sawau Fijians or foreigners (Pigliasco 2007b, 2009b). They have no incentive to

respect norms in the interest of the general community; fear of sanctions is simply nonexistent due to the elders' lack of jurisdiction in the age of the Internet (Pigliasco 2009b, forthcoming; Kuruk 1999, 786).

At a critical juncture, when their cultural heritage has been misrepresented, misused, and epistemologically attacked (Pigliasco 2007b, 2010, forthcoming), members of the Sawau tribe found it important to engage in a collaborative, reciprocal production and mapping of knowledge. I practiced law for ten years before going back to academia, and since my first visit to Beqa in 2001 the members of the tribe made me something like a consultant or an applied anthropologist. Although I and two westernized members of the chiefly family were behind the project and it was endorsed by the paramount chief, watching the villagers' enthusiastic responses led me to believe that the project enjoyed popular support as well.

The Sawau Project is a celebration, aided by new technologies, of traditional customs. The project is a response to external pressures—dominant hegemonic forces and agents of change and distortion such as the Methodist and Pentecostal churches and the tourism industry (Pigliasco 2007b, 2011, nd). Only time will show the real impact of *The Sawau Project*, as it was designed to continue. I would not be surprised to see the project relocated to hypermedia space one day soon. Many members of the Sawau tribe (including Felix, the Tui Sawau, and my collaborator Mika's daughter, who lives in Honolulu) use Facebook pages to maintain contacts with family members in and outside Fiji, reinforcing the idea that strong transnational connections and close ties among Pacific Islanders are crucial.

TL: Some critics argue that participatory, collaborative visual ethnography projects are just old wine in new bottles. Why and when did visual methodologies occur to you as crucial to collaborative work?

GCP: Early on in Beqa, I realized that the logocentric approach of representing the complex realities of fieldwork in a notebook, then transforming those words into an ethnography denied much of the multisensory experience of the culture. That's when I became aware of a potential role shift from academic to consultant making use of both my legal and anthropological knowledge. The use of the visual for social intervention is nothing new. In the past, this practice mainly involved a problem-solving approach employing visual anthropological theory, methodology, and practice to achieve nonacademic ends (Pink 2006, 87); the trend today seems more toward autoethnographies created by native researchers in collaboration

with sympathetic nonnative anthropologists. Several anthropologists have recently explored ways in which native and nonnative anthropologists have sometimes allied, producing strategic or academic interpretations (see, eg, Field 1999; Lassiter 2005a, 2005b).

Indigenous anthropologists like Epeli Hau'ofa have inspired new generations of indigenous researchers and artists who are taking time not only to remember but also to document their history and rewrite their ethnographies according to their ways of learning, creating, and conveying knowledge (see Watanabe 2010). Indigenous knowledge is not pure, timeless, archaic, or untainted by the passage of time (Quanchi 2004). As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has noted, change is intrinsic to culture, and measures intended to preserve, conserve, safeguard, and sustain particular cultural practices must acknowledge the risk of "freezing" them as unchanging (2004, 58–59). For example, she argued, performance cannot be saved and recorded: once documented, it becomes something else. But if the "performance's being . . . becomes itself through disappearance" as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004, 60) argued after Peggy Phelan (1993), then the performance's only life is in the present. However, this denies the diachronic, dialogic aspect intrinsic to any traditional performance, including firewalking and land diving. In this view, time and change, which are central to the metacultural nature of culture, cannot be accounted for or studied.

Working on *The Sawau Project* helped me rethink the way questions are asked, how issues are defined, and how communities view themselves in relation to cultural property and heritage issues. My role in the project enabled me to share my visual and research methodologies at village and national levels in Fiji, which made me realize anthropology's critical contribution to the future of indigenous intangible cultural property (Napier 2002, 310) in demonstrating what sorts of initiatives may be feasible, and in using that knowledge to become a good "advocate" for indigenous peoples who have less access to international meetings.

The role of advocacy in anthropology has lately generated several misconceptions (see Fluehr-Lobban 2006; Hastrup and Elsass 1990; Rylko-Bauer, Singer, and van Willigen 2006). Advocacy may be better envisioned as occurring along a continuum, presupposing different collaborative forms and beneficiaries within the community (Rylko-Bauer, Singer, and van Willigen 2006; Hastrup and Elsass 1990; Singer 1990). In this sense, advocacy and collaboration may promote dialogue among diverse social groups or focus on the rights and needs of specific groups in conflicted

situations, and, in some cases, lead anthropologists to become researchers for and consultants to indigenous peoples and traditional communities (Posey 1998, 242).

Darrell Addison Posey has argued that applied anthropology will not move forward without developing new methodologies for holding dialogues with local knowledge custodians (1998; see also Sillitoe 1998). Therefore, a central point of cultural representation should be concern with self-development and self-determination issues, promoting dialogic conditions (Coombe 1998, 208).

TL: Along with collaboration, empowerment, and reciprocity, I had always embraced these same arguments of Posey and Paul Sillitoe on cultural representation. But again, during the *UrSprung* experience, I had to adjust these ideas to the actual political and social circumstances.

The questions are whether and how “dialogic conditions” with “local custodians” can be realized. Of course, such relations can be established (Lassiter 2005a, 2005b); our situation, however, was extremely difficult. This was partly due to the unclear hierarchic structures that exist in most of Melanesia and partly because of extreme sensitivity to the use of visual media, especially when land diving is concerned. After Vanuatu’s independence in 1980, a rediscovery by Ni-Vanuatu of *kastom* and tradition was part of the search for their new, old, and, most important, their *own* identity and common cultural memory (Jolly 1994a; Lipp 2008). Today, there is pride in and strong awareness of the value of *kastom*, to a large extent because of the activities of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre. It is also a consequence of the remarkable cultural independence the *kastom* communities managed to exercise throughout the twentieth century (Jolly 1994a; Lipp 2008). Right from the beginning of my fieldwork in Bunlap, I had the strong notion of dealing with absolutely equal partners: every step had to be negotiated, and all my actions, especially if visual media were involved, were closely observed by certain “chiefs.”

At this point, it is important to mention that “chiefs” were not known in this area before the colonial government appointed some high-ranking “big men” in the 1940s to facilitate control over the population. In Bunlap, as in many other places of Vanuatu, chieftaincies have become de facto hereditary, often passed on within nuclear families. The most powerful “chief” in Bunlap since the late 1980s has been Telkon Watas. He has spread the word that his ancestors were all chiefs, trying to mythologize the history of his chieftaincy and turn it into a “natural” right. In the mid-

1990s, Telkon left the island and now returns only sporadically to Bunlap, where he is still the most influential and feared man.

Until very recently, anyone who wanted to film the “original” *gol*—performed by the *kastom* Sa on Pentecost’s remote east coast³—had to see Telkon and pay him a fee before going to Pentecost. Attending one of the numerous land-diving performances held for tourists on the west coast is comparatively easy and much less costly (Lipp 2008; Jolly 1994b; de Burlo 1996), but films of land diving, especially of the east coast *kastom* people, have become an extremely highly valued commodity. For Telkon, *gol* is by far the easiest way to generate a large cash income. Sums of up to US\$25,000 for his permission to film a single land dive in Bunlap were not unusual. Telkon promises to use these monies for communal development on the island, but this has rarely happened. Despite growing frustration about his actions in the village, until recently nobody dared to challenge him publicly. Some people in Bunlap secretly tried to organize *gol* themselves, but stepped back and even paid fines to Telkon when he heard of it. This situation was very important in the events that rendered my fieldwork and the preparations for *UrSprung* so difficult.

Telkon clearly was the “local custodian” of the *gol*, but his knowledge about it, compared to that of other *kastom* Sa, was not very elaborate. Nor did learning more about this heritage, its history, and its diverse meanings—for the sake of just knowing and potentially preserving it—occur to him as something positive or necessary.

I can to some extent agree with Nicholas Thomas’s comment that the preservation of knowledge and art in museums and cultural centers is in some ways a positive consequence of colonization (1989, 43–44). It also is clearly an idealization. Most anthropologists and curators are certainly interested in, and value, culture and heritage per se; however, they also all hope to make their names—and their livings—in academia. Is it possible that Telkon was more honest? He was quite happy to control and benefit from it and was not interested in the “self-development” or “self-determination” of his people or in “dialogic conditions” with, for instance, the Vanuatu Cultural Centre or an anthropologist. The last thing he wanted was “visual research” of the culture he “owned” being conducted for purely scientific reasons, or a model of it being displayed in a museum. Such visuals would potentially give others, even Europeans, access to its reproduction, cutting his cash flow. He didn’t want or need the “advocacy” or the “feedback” of an anthropologist who was neither able nor willing to compensate him personally with large amounts of cash. Further,

he didn't want the Vanuatu Cultural Centre to interfere with his business, so he undermined its actions whenever he could. For instance, he did not obey the center's 2006 official ban on commercial *gol* filming activities, which was intended to prevent further mismanagement. It is very clear that Telkon's "indigenous knowledge" is not pure, timeless, or archaic, but rather practical and benefit oriented (Quanchi 2004). Should we condemn him for having attitudes on which our own society is largely built?

TL: What's the challenge for indigenous curators decolonizing the past in Fiji?

GCP: The real challenge, and at the same time the innovation of Fiji's cultural-mapping program and other similar projects in Oceania, is that they have been successfully defying the hegemony of the Eurocentric secularization of knowledge, representation, and collection (Stanley 2007; Kreps 2007). For most Pacific communities, material and immaterial heritage stands for important traditions, ideas, customs, and social relations, and it is embedded in stories and performances. In other words, the land and the people represent the community's heritage; heritage is not accessorial but fundamental (Kreps 2007).

Both *The Sawau Project* and the national cultural-mapping program embody these points very well, and they borrow and simultaneously subvert ideas of ethnological collection and colonial practice. Christina Kreps observed that Pacific museums and cultural centers are arenas where the idea of culture is reformulated, redefined, reinterpreted, and represented (2007). Several museums in Oceania could be transformed into cultural centers. Cultural centers can host digital archives and can be both physical and memory spaces, becoming containers of the collective memory of their creators, their users, and their interpreters (Wallot 1991). Another key point is that communities' interests are in using the collections and the institutions to address contemporary issues (Bolton 2001, 230–231).

After Thomas (1989), Roy MacLeod argued that the "logic of colonization that privileged Europeans also conserved elements of local knowledge and so preserved cultural facts that indigenous peoples now employ" (1998, 315). Several authors (eg, France 1969; Groves 1963; Abramson 2000) have expressed strong skepticism about colonial registers, censuses, and collections like the Tukutuku Raraba (oral histories of Fijian groups recorded in past centuries by the Native Land Commission). British Native Lands commissioners held hearings across Fiji beginning

in the 1880s, soliciting historical testimony that could be used to codify “traditional” Fijian social groups and land tenure practices and link specific groups to specific lands. Molded into the Tukutuku Raraba, this testimony promptly became “official history” and classified information, stored in the restricted archives of the Native Lands and Fisheries Commission (NLFC) (Humphrey 2009).

Regardless of the accuracy of the information in the Tukutuku Raraba, gaining access to this “official history” is fairly difficult. In February 2005, Mika and I visited the NLFC headquarters in Suva—where the Tukutuku Raraba and the Vola ni Kawa Bula (the official Fijian register of native landowners) are conserved—and were directed to the office of Ratu Viliame Tagivetaua, a member of the former Great Council of Chiefs. Tagivetaua counted from his register of native landowners six *mataqali* (clans) from whom we needed to receive written authorization. One of these, Navusalevu, I had never heard of before. I heard Mika say, timidly, “E sega ni dua e tiko e na koro . . .” (None of them are left in the village [Dakuibeqa]). Such incongruence shows that the NLFC records do not correspond to the current social organization of the *vanua*, a point that had emerged in charting the Naivilaqata genealogy for *The Sawau Project* (figure 8). For example, “Salote,” “Joana,” “Ana,” and “Suliasi” from Navusalevu *mataqali* were still registered as alive, though they were long gone. Illegitimate children, de facto “marriages” and “divorces,” and other sensitive information are not recorded in the Vola ni Kawa Bula but are well acknowledged at the level of the *vanua* (people of the land).

During the three months of delays before Mika and I could access the Tukutuku Raraba of the Sawau *yavusa*, I became aware of the sensitivity and significance of its information and the necessity of renegotiating state sponsorship and guardianship of Fijian communities’ “official” past. However, this “colonial practice” turned out to be an inspiration for a counterintuitive development of *The Sawau Project*, where the recognition of indigenous curatorial practices challenges their “official past,” becoming another step toward the decolonization and democratization of archival practices.

TL: After more than five years of living and researching in the Pacific and in sub-Saharan Africa, but especially after the *UrSprung* experience, I see the decolonization project more as a metaphor for a critique of illegitimate exertions of power in general. In this sense, I agree with Toon van Meijl that the ethnicity of the partners in a multivocal venture should not be an



FIGURE 8. Marika Tivitivi reconstructing the genealogical chart for the Naivilaqata clan, the traditional custodians of the firewalking ceremony. The chart lists 275 individuals, going back eight generations. Dakuibeqa, Beqa, Fiji, 2005. Photo by Guido Carlo Pigliasco.

issue (2009, 351). Nonetheless, I feel it is naive to unconditionally plead for a multiform society where no voices should be silenced, inside or outside (van Meijl 2009). But whose voices should be heard? Who has the right to decide about this, and on which criteria are these decisions based?

When I returned to Bunlap in December 2008, I did as my partners in the village had asked: I did not talk to Telkon beforehand because he would have inevitably demanded large amounts of money. Instead I negotiated the circumstances of our long-planned project publicly in Bunlap's biggest men's house. I announced that funding was available for the project and that I also had 10,000 euros to be publicly handed over to the village representatives in the men's house to support the development of a much-needed water supply. The plan was well received, but people instantly expressed the fear that Telkon would be against it. Telkon did try to stop the project, claiming that he alone had the right to allow such

activities as building a model of a *gol* tower or erecting a traditional house in Germany, and he accused me personally of theft of his cultural property.

The six men chosen to go on the trip feared his anger and were unsure whether to continue. Telkon launched angry comments in the press and on television accusing me and my Bunlap partners—some of them his relatives—of theft of national heritage. He reported us to the police, to the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, and to Vanuatu's Great Council of Chiefs (the *Malvatumauri*), again publicly accusing us all of theft of his cultural property. When some of his kinsmen reminded him that he himself, with members of his nuclear family, had gone to Japan and Australia to do quite similar projects but solely for his own benefit rather than for the community's, he claimed that this was his chiefly right. After numerous lengthy meetings with representatives of all these bodies, Telkon lost his case. The institutions he approached declared that the *UrSprung* project was obviously backed by a majority in the village and by the relevant institutions. They declared Telkon's allegations to be not their business. At a final public discussion in the village, Telkon again lost his case—a first in Bunlap.

His loss was due not primarily to the *UrSprung* project, but was the result of long frustration with his unsatisfactory leadership. For me this was good news. The road to do the project, so it seemed, was finally open. I was free to buy an old, unused house and to dismantle it and ship it, together with several dozen daily household objects, to Port Vila. Here I bought more construction materials and artifacts, had it all checked by the Vanuatu Cultural Centre to comply with the country's strict cultural export regulations, packed it into a container, sent it to Germany, and flew home myself.

Three weeks later, I received an e-mail saying that Chief Bebe Malegel had suddenly passed away. Bebe was a widely respected, healthy, middle-aged man, and my best friend, partner, and most important informant in Bunlap. He was Telkon's nephew, but had become his most important opponent during the last five years. This is not the place to talk at length of the death of this man who was very dear to me, but all circumstances indicate that it did not have a natural cause. A month later, when Martina Kleinert and I returned to pick up our other guests, none of them dared to come. They were all still in a state of shock and feared similar consequences for themselves and their families. We were told to stay in the capital because it would be too dangerous to go to Bunlap. This situation was emotionally extremely exhausting; we had believed in collaboration, reciprocity, and empowerment and had yet unwillingly and unknowingly

helped to create a situation that by far exceeded our worst fears. We had, in a long and arduous process, convinced more than a dozen partners and donors in Germany to support us on the basis of very idealistic premises, and now had to deal with a completely nonideal situation. Yet we had duties to fulfill in Germany. In some ways, and despite what had happened, Telkon was still the de facto “custodian” of the *gol* and “guardian” of his people. But should his voice really be the one heard and listened to? What were we to do?

We saw Telkon’s desperate attempt to stay in control as clearly illegitimate. If we took our convictions seriously, this was not the moment to stop but the moment to continue. We invited three other men from South Pentecost whom we knew well and who happened to be in Port Vila at the time. Outraged about what had happened in Bunlap, Betu Watas, Tolak Telkon, and Mathias Wataskon saw this as a chance to weaken Telkon’s influence; they decided to come along and take the places of their brothers and cousins.

TL: Are the counternarratives collected by *The Sawau Project* also an invitation to unmake the imaginary construction and “legendary traditions” created in colonial times? In other words, do you think the future will yield a larger place for this type of project?

GCP: In visual anthropologist Harald Prins’s words, “as the Internet creates new political space for indigenous peoples,” its use expands and intensifies, and so does what he calls “the ‘overseeing gaze’ of encapsulating polities and transnational corporations” (2002, 71). In fact, Faye Ginsburg’s famous “Faustian dilemma” argument still divides indigenous rights advocates: “On the one hand, they are finding new modes for expressing indigenous identity through media and gaining access to film and video to serve their own needs and ends. On the other hand, the spread of communications technology such as home video and satellite downlinks threatens to be a final assault on culture, language, imagery, relationship between generations, and respect for traditional knowledge” (1991, 96).

I believe that multimedia and hypermedia projects are an example of repossession of agency by indigenous communities like the Sawau. More importantly, they are a repossession of oral narratives. Between 1999 and 2010, I collected more than two hundred references ranging over more than 150 years on Beqa and Sawau history and on the firewalking ceremony in Beqa and Oceania, now conserved at the iTaukei Institute of Language and

Culture. In this collection, the deliberate classification of the *italanoa* (narrative) of *nai tekitekivu ni vilavilairevo* (how firewalking began) in Beqa as myth, legend, or folktale emerges. However, in many cultures, it is hard to draw a sharp line between myths and history. A story may be considered true in one society, but fictional in another (Bacchilega 2007, 15).

Collaboration with the village elders and the Naivilaqata clan recipients of variants of this narrative was fundamental to understanding the plasticity of the *italanoa* of *vilavilairevo*. Most folklorists are content simply to record numerous versions of a myth in the field. Using Mika's notes and recordings and my archival research, our project attempted to correlate variations in the versions of the *italanoa* of *vilavilairevo* (see Dundes 1984, 207).

From a Beqan epistemological point of view, each time the *italanoa* is recited, it emotionally reinforces and validates the ritual and the audience's respect for their ancestors. Each narration reestablishes indexical relationships with paths and sites on Beqa. Narratives transform places into landmarks in time and space, making them monuments of Island history (see Siikala and Siikala 2005, 119, 131). Immortalizing the *italanoa* in *The Sawau Project* through the participation of late *bete* (traditional priest) Apenisa Kuruiwaca, and watching the Sawau community's reaction, I realized that up to the present day, the *italanoa* of *vilavilairevo* serves not just as the basis for the ceremony, or entertainment, but for how the Sawau's *na bula vakaveivekani* (kinship way of life) is preserved.

TL: What conclusions may be drawn from all this?

GCP: Actually, as the "global agency" of these projects (Prins 2002, 72) is yet to be critically evaluated, there is no conclusion. However, some things have certainly changed in the last decade. On one hand, issues of sovereignty, decolonization, and class and interest remain at the heart of struggles for social justice in many areas of the Pacific, complicating the politics (and poetics) of writing culture today. On the other hand, a new figure has entered the scene, the indigenous ethnographer. Anthropology no longer speaks with automatic authority for others who are supposedly "primitive" and unable to speak for themselves, and ethnography is trying to break away from the convention of the omnipotent authorial voice (Clifford and Marcus 1986).

Following the example of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre's cultural research policy—which includes guiding principles on Ni-Vanuatu cus-

toms and traditions and a research agreement policy between the National Cultural Council and the local community—Fiji’s iTaukei Institute of Language and Culture is evaluating a policy proposal for an “Indigenous Fijians Research Framework.” Based on Fijian scholar Unaisi Nabobo-Baba’s research framework (2006), the proposal would establish the institute as a repository of materials collected by researchers and formulate a code of ethics for both local and overseas researchers, who will be expected to protect and uphold the customary rights of the traditional owners. This is being developed in conjunction with the implementation of indigenous intellectual property rights and a bill intended to protect Fiji’s tangible and intangible cultural heritage (Pigliasco 2007a, 2007b, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, forthcoming). The policy is also reflected in the larger 2010–2015 “Pacific Culture and Education Strategy” plan prepared jointly by the Council of Pacific Arts and Culture and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, and focused on mapping and disseminating research conducted on Pacific values and ethics at all levels, and publicizing Pacific research methodologies through national and regional partners.

As for the growing practice of “collaborative ethnography” (Lassiter 2005b), new methodologies tend to resonate with indigenous practices of storytelling, and video has been adopted rapidly by Pacific Island researchers and authors (White and Tengan 2001, 403; Ginsburg in preparation). Visual anthropologist Hennessy and folklorists and ethnographers Patrick Moore and Amber, Robin, and Jillian Ridington discuss the importance of interlinear translations of ethnographic texts, which depend on the translator’s ability to understand the ethno-poetics of the native language (R Ridington and others in press). *The Sawau Project* and other similar projects (Hennessy 2006; Ginsburg forthcoming; Prins 2002; Ridington and Hennessy 2008) exemplify the autonomy and potential of new visual media to collect original performances and narratives in indigenous languages, avoiding textual translations.

Collaboration is not new in visual anthropology; however, as Felicia Hughes-Freeland commented (2004, 216), it is always human interactions, negotiations, and creativity that will carry us forward, and always human power strategies and equivocations that hold us back. Camouflaged under the romantic intent of saving the natives from global evil, *The Sawau Project* challenges ethnographic methodologies and practices mediating culture with new reflexive, collaborative, and participatory approaches to ethics, research, and representation where multimedia, multilinear, and

multivocal technologies become new methods of visual research and new ways of creating reflexive texts (see Pink 2004).

The Sawau Project also shows that despite what Eric Kansa (2009, 225) and other information technology experts think, the imposition of culturally alien databases and technology does not necessarily dissociate indigenous culture from its context, depriving it of meaning and opening it to appropriation. These projects' community responses suggest a new role for digital archives and cultural media as tools for repatriating language materials and cultural documentation—such as photographs, film, and audio and video recordings—and their capacity to extend traditional cultural worlds into new domains.

TL: I have discussed the numerous, severe problems that plagued the preparations of *UrSprung* that in many ways corrected my naive conceptions of collaboration, reciprocity, and empowerment. Before we conclude, I would like to mention that the two-month-long actual project phase of *UrSprung* in Germany between May and July 2009 went extraordinarily well. It truly surpassed all our expectations. The fears that we originally had, and the concerns of our critics, were practically not an issue. The *UrSprung* team is currently in the process of preparing a book and multimedia DVD that will contain the accompanying reverse anthropology photography project, a multivocal film, and several articles on questions pertaining to collaborative anthropology in Oceania.

Who has benefitted from this venture? Who came in touch with it through which communication channels? All of the printed materials, catalogues, postcards, posters, and several hundred photographs, as well as several CDs with music of the Laef Kastom String Band, were given to the Vanuatu Cultural Centre and to our collaborators, and thus taken back to the village, where they were heavily circulated.

In Germany, the three exhibitions have so far been visited by approximately 5,000 people, and the South Seas Collection in Obergünzburg continues to attract a growing number of visitors. Five radio broadcasts, between three and thirty minutes in length, have been aired, two by the national German cultural program Deutschlandfunk. A half-hour live television broadcast with our guests was aired by the Bavarian Broadcasting Association (BR). Seventeen newspaper articles were published, including a full-page article in Munich's largest newspaper, *Münchner Merkur*, and a half-page article in Germany's biggest tabloid, *Bild*. All of these, and much

more material, can be accessed through our website, www.ursprung-in-der-suedsee.de.

What is the use of all this? Cultural memory does not automatically come into being. It is shaped by the actions of people. The Islands have memory, and I believe that through collaborative efforts such as this one we, as anthropologists, fulfill a somewhat logical promise.

The thoughts on collaboration discussed in this article inevitably contribute to the epistemology of a future anthropology (Fluehr-Lobban 2006). However, it is also necessary to talk openly about how deep the gaps can be sometimes between idealistic theoretical and programmatic approaches on one hand and their manifestations in reality on the other. Today, it is banal to say that even the gentlest ethnographic research has an impact on all parties involved. It is already less banal to admit that every anthropological activity is *de facto* cultural production, because culture is inherently “in action” (Hörning and Reuter 2004).

What is not often talked about is that “doing culture” is subject not only to intercultural misunderstandings that can be more or less elegantly dealt with, but also to the contradictory personal, economic, and political interests of the parties involved. I agree with Klaus Peter Koepping, who stressed that the “authenticity” of anthropologists lies in their willingness to become as engaged as possible with the people they deal with, to carry their belief systems abroad while simultaneously actively mooting them (1987, 32). Stanley Diamond famously asked anthropologists to act: “Authentic anthropologists will not make careers out of their alienation, but will understand it as a specific instance of a pathological condition, demanding political commitment and action. . . . We will understand ourselves and our world only by seeking to change ourselves and our world” (1974, 330).

The same applies, however, to our indigenous partners who “work with us” and become, in many ways, anthropologists themselves. Reciprocity means responding to positive actions with positive actions. As such, the precondition for collaboration is that all parties are willing to get involved in actions that might question their own cultural coordinate systems. Collaborative anthropology is an existential undertaking. It is not so much about perfect, beautiful, or flawless reasoning as it is about disturbing, incoherent, and intense human practice. I hope that the actions of all parties involved in *UrSprung* will have a positive impact both on the memory of Bunlap and Vanuatu, as well as on that of our society and academia back home.

Notes

1 Sa is an Austronesian language spoken in southern Pentecost Island.

2 The term *iTaukei* has recently replaced the term *Fijian* to indicate indigenous Fijian people.

3 *Kastom* Sa and *skul* Sa both speak the same language, Sa. But while *kastom* Sa live in many ways according to their traditional “customs” and beliefs, their *skul* cousins have accepted churches and “schools.” Both clearly represent the white man’s way of thinking and clash in many ways with traditions such as pig-killing ceremonies, sister exchange, bride price, or wearing of grass skirts (women) and penis wrappers (men). The separation of the Sa speakers into these two distinctly different cultural groups is thus a direct effect of colonialization. While until Vanuatu’s independence in 1980 *kastom* Sa were regarded as a backward minority, this situation has changed considerably. *Kastom* is today an integral part of Vanuatu’s identity, and the old tensions between *kastom* and *skul* Sa have almost faded away.

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Abstract

More than two decades ago, Marshall Sahlins reminded us that Oceania’s Islands have a history. They also have a memory. Anthropologists and other social researchers often deal with the problem how to actively turn orally transmitted memories into written or audiovisual representations. But in fact, researchers are much more involved than that: they become part of the Islands’ cultural memory due to their actions—what they do and do not do. European anthropologists Guido Carlo Pigliasco and Thorolf Lipp re-propose a series of reflections on opportunities and challenges of “doing culture” in collaboration with indigenous counterparts.

KEYWORDS: doing culture, memory, collaboration, visual representation, cultural media, indigenous heritage, applied anthropology